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Holiday Homesickness: How to Handle It  
8 Winter Wonderland Adventures  
Travel: Hong Kong





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All JETs in Hyogo are encouraged to send in articles, musings, poetry, prose, and any ideas to improve the Hyogo Times for the betterment of the Hyogo JET community. Submit by the 15th of each month to [hyogotimespublications@gmail.com](mailto:hyogotimespublications@gmail.com)

## Message from the Editor:

hello!

First off, let me congratulate any JET who arrived this past July and August on almost completing their first term of teaching here in Japan. For all your initial classroom confusion, cultural faux pas, and any other mishaps, you've nearly made it to your first closing ceremony. Let winter vacation be your reward. Though the three-day weekends this past term have been wonderful, I often feel that they were more of a tease than an actual break. Sure you find yourself with Monday off, but then you're left to make up the classes that were missed and the marking that goes with it. November is also a month many JETs are busy helping students prepare for entrance exams and speech contests and we find ourselves working hours typical of our Japanese coworkers. This isn't a huge deal, but an increased workload and the change in weather, as you may have already experienced, can take a toll on your health. So if you're like me, you're telling yourself that all you have to do is get past the grading of term end exams and you'll be on your way to a nice relaxing, and if I may add well-earned, winter vacation.

This article is one of our smaller issues, so take your time with it. However, if you'll be busy traveling this month, you may find it more convenient for your schedule. Inside you'll find our always willing advisor, Rackle Beaman offering tips on overcoming the holidays

away from home, take a peek inside the brain and philosophy of Scott Patterson as he shares his thoughts on Motoko Town and catch up on the latest news in Japan. As always Brittany shares her travels this time discussing Hong Kong prior to the protests, you're given five things to watch while you try to stay warm, and if you missed out on catching the spectacular koyo, our readers have you covered. Lastly, get all the inside info on Tochigi Prefecture, from Tochigi's very own Ryan Suzuki in this month's Prefecture Spotlight.

During this holiday travel season, besides the usual advice of have fun and stay safe, start thinking about what you want that New Year's resolution to be. A long break is a wonderful time to rest, recuperate, and remind ourselves why we are here in the first place. What are the things you want to change in your classroom? What are the things you had been meaning to implement this past year, but never got around to doing? A new year and a new term is a good place time for new ideas. For those who won't be returning for another year (have you turned in your recontracting forms yet?) the hardest thing to avoid is simply coasting to the end. Keep pushing and challenging yourself to create fun and engaging lessons and to finish this last school year strong. As a friend once said, "In Act 1, I was struggling to survive, nobody wanted my action dead or alive. Act 2, I hit the big time... and I can't help myself because I was born to shine."

Sean



hello!

## message from the Prefectural Representative

If you're feeling a bit woozy after each lesson from kerosene inhalation you know that it's that magical time of year, when you can't move (physically) from layers and (metaphorically) for saccharine jingles blaring from every speaker. Yes it's winter, and Christmas is coming, and if you're from the Southern hemisphere you might be feeling like a bit of an idiot struggling to stay warm in a down coat designed for the Arctic as your Northern friends wear t-shirts.

At this time, many may experience Seasonal Affective Disorder, more commonly (and appropriately) known as SAD. It is important to be aware of the ways that being sad and having SAD can affect your mood, and to take action before it overwhelms. Symptoms of SAD can include not eating, eating too much, not sleeping, sleeping too much, overuse of stimulants such as alcohol or tobacco, being in a constant state of sadness or irritability, lack of energy, and withdrawing from social situations.

Luckily, with the introduction of a few endorphins into your system the symptoms of SAD can be alleviated or even eliminated. Make sure to get enough sleep. Eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of greens and fish. Watch how much you drink, or smoke. Exercise and stretch. Make plenty of time for your friends. Try to get outside in the



daytime hours for vitamin D. And reach out if you are struggling. There is always help on hand if you need it. The AJET Peer Support Group offers confidential telephone counseling from 8PM to 7AM every night, and can be reached on 050-5534-5566.

If you are looking for something to get you out from under the kotatsu and out of the house, from December 4 - 15 Luminaire will light up Kobe's Motomachi area. If you lack a significant other to do romantic things with or want to appreciate the glittery spectacle with friends, why not join Hyogo AJET on December 11 to meander through the incredible display and afterwards sample the best festival food Kansai has to offer.

For those going home for the holiday season, please enjoy your time with family and friends, eat good cheese and deli meat, drink delicious and reasonably priced wine, and be merry. For those who are travelling, stay safe, and have fun. If you're staying in Japan, get up early on January 1 to climb a mountain and see the sunrise, or visit a temple at midnight to receive blessings for the year ahead. And don't forget the Christmas cake! Merry Christmas and happy holidays!

Kylie Pinder

## Renkon Kinpira

kicchiri  
kitchen



### Ingredients

Prep time: 10 minutes  
Cook time: 5 minutes  
Serves 2-3 as a side dish

- >> 200g renkon (lotus root)
- >> 1 Tbs. sesame oil
- >> 1 ½ Tbs. soy sauce
- >> 1 ½ Tbs. mirin (sweet cooking wine)
- >> 1 tsp. sugar
- >> 1 tsp. white sesame seeds (optional)
- >> Dash of chilli flakes or 1 small dried chilli, finely chopped (optional)

Kinpira – salty, sweet, crunchy vegetables with a hint of spice – what is there not to like about this popular dish? Often found as a teeny side dish in bentos, it always left me craving more, so I took matters into my own hands and learnt how to make it. Kinpira is most commonly made using gobo (burdock root) and carrot, but this version with renkon (lotus root) is less of a hassle to make and just as delicious. Happy cooking!

**One** Peel the renkon. Cut in half length-wise (to make a half moon shape) and then cut into 3-5mm slices. Soak in a bowl of water for a few minutes.

**Two** Mix the soy sauce, mirin and sugar in a small bowl. Set aside.

**Three** Drain the renkon slices and pat them with a paper towel to get rid of excess moisture.

**Four** Heat the sesame oil in a frypan and add the renkon, spreading them out evenly. Do not stir, just leave it as is for one minute.

**Five** Cook for another minute, this time stir-frying it.

**Six** Turn off the heat. Take the pan off the stove and add the sauce from step 2 and chilli if using. Return to

the heat and cook for a further minute and 20 seconds (or until the sauce is mostly gone).

**Seven** Turn off the heat and stir through the sesame seeds.

>> Renkon sizes vary and how small you want the pieces is up to you. Generally for large renkon I'll cut it into quarters and for smaller ones I'll just cut in half or even leave it whole.

>> When cooking renkon, it will sometimes turn purple. It may look weird but it's nothing to worry about, it's still perfectly edible!

>> Don't skip the soaking! I forgot it once and the vegetables burnt before they were cooked.

>> Turning off the heat is important as the soy sauce, mirin and sugar mixture burns easily.

Helen Yuan



# Holiday Homesickness - How to Handle It

In case you've been living under a rock these past few weeks you will be well aware that the season to be jolly is here. In addition it has left every bare inch of unattended retail space drenched in tinsel and baubles while a variety of Christmas jingles waft overhead with their own unique Japanese twist. Thus we find ourselves pondering our own holiday season traditions and how this year will definitely be different, possibly harder, for many colder and much much more lonelier.

For some these past few months have been a bumpy ride into a new life and the temptation of the safe and stable life you left at home has reared its head more than once since you've arrived and this season that pull back to the familiar grows stronger still. For others we scoff at it, "Really? Homesickness? Me? But I love it here, how could I possibly be miserable?" But then when you sit in your little flat alone, your thoughts wander to what your loved ones are doing back home, without you. Suddenly all those little things you said you'd never miss, you now yearn for and unless you're near a Costco you ain't gonna get it any time soon.

Homesickness is a constant looming demon for we JETs. Nearly every predeparture seminar made a point of warning us, orientation dropped comments constantly and there's even a section in the general handbook that talks about the ins and outs of this specific cultural phenomenon. In particular all these sources indicated one key fact; this time of year is the worst for us. So what can you do?

My first and firmest piece of guidance is thus; Whatever you do, Don't Go Home.

Oh I know it's tempting for many of you, overwhelmingly tempting even, but do not give in my gorgeous cherubs because now is the point where your will is at its weakest. When you find yourself in your comfort zone what is there to draw you back here? To dear old Nippon where eight months of your contract, language barriers and culture shock still await.

So what now, you can't go home but you sure as hell can't stay in your apartment all alone. What can you do?

## - Make an event with other JETs

Got a few JETs in your area who haven't got anything planned? Too easy, make your own event, choose the largest apartment amongst you and host your own holiday shindig, make it a pot luck, and throw in a secret gift exchange to really beef things up and go all out.

## - Travel somewhere you've never been

Just because I said you can't go home, doesn't mean you can't go out. To my Aussie and Kiwi JETs I mention that getting to Europe is about a third of the cost it is when you're back home, I personally am going to be in Italy. Korea is just over the road and if you want something warmer there's the whole of South Asia to play in. Not to mention there's a number of places you've yet to explore right here in Japan. Really this world is pretty big when you can go anywhere you want so you might as well make the most of it.

## - Decorate and Bake

If you're feeling like where you are is nothing like home then it's time to switch it up. Every hyakuen store this side of the eastern seaboard is bursting with festive home ware. Be unashamed in your love of green and red, cover everything in it. Download every familiar jingle you can, set up a YouTube playlist. Grab your favourite holiday recipe and see what you can slap together. Let the smells and sights of home fill your house and suddenly the distance isn't so big

## - Set up a Skype date

Then keep it on all day if you need to. If someone in the family has a laptop or tablet put it on the family dining table and sit down with your own holiday meal with the family. Let yourself be at home even if you aren't, you know, at home in the physical sense.

## - Be out and about

Don't be at home the whole day, go out somewhere nice for dinner, or meet up with some local friends, see a movie. If you need carols and Christmas cheer go sit in a shopping center, just do something that takes you out of the house. If you want to make it something fancy go to Tokyo or your other nearest big city and book a luxurious hotel while you lavish yourself in retail therapy and relaxation. Get out there and do something different.

## - Create a local event of your own

Have you been more or less adopted by the local population of your tinsy winsy township? Why not give back? Host

a Christmas party at your school, local hotspot or even your own apartment and just bring in the neighbours. The aim here is not to be alone.

## - Blatantly and flagrantly insert yourself into someone else's plans

Know another group of JETs that are planning a fun event? Ask if you can join or tag along, if it's a large group then it's likely the more the merrier. Remember if all else fails, you are not above bribery.

This is the season for family and friendship, for those of us far from home, especially if it's your first one, this can be a difficult time to be so far away. So don't play it tough, don't pretend like you're above it, use one or more of these options to give yourself a chance to get through it. Let yourself feel the love this season.

Rackle Beaman



# Winter of Our Content: Eight Winter Wonderland Adventures

Although I've never been the biggest fan of winter, Japan has slowly been winning me over with its variety of unique activities during this season. When going outside may be one of the last things you want to do, these 8 activities and places will be more than enough to get you out from under the kotatsu and enjoying the season.

## 1. Hatsumode

Hatsumode is the tradition in Japan to visit a shrine, typically Shinto, over the New Year holiday. During the visit, families are meant to pray for health and luck for the upcoming year. There are often a number of food and beverage booths surrounding a shrine as well with all the tasty Japanese treats you could want. If you're in Hyogo the popular three tend to be Ikuta Shrine in Sannomiya, north of Sannomiya there is also Minatogawa Shrine, and finally Nishinomiya Shrine in, of course, Nishinomiya.



## 2. Kobe Luminarie (Dec 4 - 15)

A symbol of hope after the devastating Great Hanshin Earthquake, the Kobe Luminarie is held every December in the Motomachi area. With well over 100,000 hand-decorated lights outlining cathedral-like structures, the spectacle draws many people looking to get into the holiday spirit and is a prime spot to take that special someone in your life. However, if that's not an option for

you, surround yourself with friends by taking place in the HA-JET event on Thursday, December 11.

## 3. Kinosaki - Hyogo

What better way to stay warm during the cold season than to hop in a bath full of scalding hot water. Sure there are onsens in most towns, but only Kinosaki offers seven opportunities, each said to have their own benefits. You can read more about Kinosaki and get wonderful tips from a travel review written by Brittany earlier this year.

## 4. "Naked Man" Festival - Okayama

Although a number of "Naked Man" festivals are held throughout Japan, the most famous one happens to be Saidai-ji Eyo Hadaka Matsuri in Okayama, where the tradition began. Held every third Saturday in February at Saidai-ji Temple, you can watch over 9,000 men wearing only loincloths claw and scramble over one another to the beat of drums in an attempt to grab the shingi, a pair of lucky sacred sticks. Even though the event doesn't officially start until midnight, it doesn't stop participants and onlookers from coming much earlier in the night to enjoy the festival. If you're feeling brave and lucky join one of the many JET teams that are created for the event.

## 5. Shirakawago - Gifu

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Shirakawago is a mountain village known for its thatched roof houses. These gassho-zukuri - like hands in prayers - farmhouses when covered in snow look like the Winter Wonderland from your imagination. Similar to staying the night at a Buddhist temple at Koya-san, you can also reserve a night to stay at one of these houses.

## 6. Sapporo Snow Festival - Hokkaido

or Tokamachi Snow Festival - Niigata  
Probably the most well-known winter event among foreigners, Hokkaido's Sapporo Snow Festival is your



typical Japanese festival, but on a much larger scale. It's a combination of immense snow and ice sculptures at three sites - Odori, Tsudome (slide down the hill on a tube), and Susukino - and delicacies such as butter ramen and lamb from the Ghengis Khan restaurant at the Sapporo Brewery. That being said, if you have time to visit the brewery on its own definitely do that too.



If Hokkaido is a bit too far or you simply don't have the budget for it, the Tokamachi Snow Festival in Niigata prefecture is a bit closer to the Kansai region. Founded on the idea, "let's not make snow our enemy, let's make snow our friend," it may be worth going just to find out who created that statement. The festival is from Friday, Feb 20 - Sunday, Feb 22 and ends with a fantastic fireworks show.

## 7. Wakakusa Yamayaki - Nara

As all the leaves finally fall from the trees and winter freezes or kills most things in nature (finally, no more fruit flies!), Todaiji and Kofukuji Temples and Kasuga Shrine take part in setting Wakakusayama's dead grass ablaze. Besides viewing an amazing controlled fire climb up the

side of a mountain, the mountain burning is also supported by a colorful fireworks display, tons of food booths, and the usual ever-present deer. Bring some folding chairs or a blanket to be comfortable while you watch.



## 8. Yokote Kamakura and Boden-sai - Akita

If you're unfamiliar with what a kamakura is, it's a carved out mound of snow similar to an igloo. With more than hundreds of kamakura dotted around Yokote City you can spend time by candlelight in your very own kamakura. Akita prefecture (one of Japan's northern prefectures) also holds another great event called Boden-sai. Men are given boden, a long sacred wand, and race to the shrine on Mount Taiheizan. Perhaps not as intense or fleshy as Saidai-ji Eyo Hadaka Matsuri, Boden-sai is still a rather competitive event to see.

If these events haven't influenced to get out of the house, I'm not sure what else will. Hopefully it has, so start planning and pack warmly!

Sean Mulvihill



# Hong Kong: "You Want in on This?"

For many centuries, Hong Kong was under the control of Imperial China. However, following the First Opium War, control of the islands shifted to the United Kingdom but for a brief period in World War II when the Japanese occupied. As a colony of the UK, Hong Kong westernized and became rather democratic. In 1997, however, control of the city was returned to China. Initially, the PRC promised to give Hong Kong more democratic freedom in electing their leaders in 2017. However, earlier this year China announced it would continue to screen candidates, resulting in leaders who put China's interests ahead of Hong Kong's. You can read more about the Umbrella Revolution in Sean's October article. With fortuitous timing, we visited this historic enclave two weeks before the demonstrations erupted.

## Getting There and Around

As the cheapest option, Peach was our go-to for getting to Hong Kong. On both flights, they suspended the use of the lavatories, so make sure you relieve yourself before boarding. The seats didn't recline very far, preventing maximal relaxation, but you really can't beat the price.

The train system, MTR, is very easy to use, especially with an Octopus Card. It is fairly well connected to all of the major attractions in the city. We only used a bus once, but that was a stroke of bad luck which I'll lament about in due time.

## Where to Stay

The airport terminal offered a decent place to rest the first night. There's a second floor above the first terminal that seemed a little quieter than next to the MTR entryway, where we ended up.

At the extreme end of luxury during the trip, we stayed at Disney's Hollywood Hotel. I found a deal through

Asia Travel for park tickets and the hotel that was fairly affordable for Disney. They have a well-chlorinated pool and the room had several goodies I could pillage, including slippers and toothbrushes (you know you've lost your childhood when these are the things that excite you).

For most of our trip, we stayed at Dragon Hostel in Mong Kok. There were several bugs in our somewhat-claustrophobic private room, the curtains were more decorative than useful, and there wasn't much of a central area for travelers to meet, but the location was great, there was hot water, and they sell discount tickets which they will refund if you cannot use them (ooh, look; more foreshadowing!).

## What to Do

The first stop was Hong Kong Disneyland. It is the least visited Disney park in the world, leading to my longest wait time being around fifteen minutes. For most rides, it took longer to walk through the queue than to wait. There are also a couple unique attractions (my favorite was the Grizzly Gulch Mine Cars) and the Iron Man Experience is set to open up sometime in 2015. The food and souvenirs are at typical Disney prices, but the park itself is quite affordable. One day is more than enough to do everything you could want to, and its location near the airport makes it an easy first- or last-day trip.

I ended up seeing the Tian Tan Buddha twice. The first time, we rode the cable car up to Ngong Ping, which was beautiful. We



also walked along the Wisdom Path and felt all the wiser for it. The second trip was not quite as smooth, unfortunately. We had bought discount cable car tickets at our hostel only to find upon our arrival that the cars were under scheduled maintenance for the rest of the week. We were forced to take the bus up, which was not terribly comfortable and, as it was the only means of public transportation left, took forever to get on. While waiting, a few behind our group fled in terror due to the prospect of a typhoon, to which one of us scoffed. Naturally, this meant that we were violently rained upon after reaching the peak. There were also heavy winds, which were fun but also concerning whilst near the Buddha.

There is also a lovely vegetarian cafe at a nearby temple with delicious spring rolls.

Victoria Peak offers a stunning view of the city. The tram is an entertaining method of reaching the peak as it rises at a 45 degree angle for a good portion of the journey. The lines are pretty lengthy (granted, we went at perhaps the worst possible time--Saturday evening), though there is always the option of walking back down. My favorite part of our walk was encountering the skittish cats. Also near the Peak Tram is the escalator/"travelator" walking tour. There were several interesting-looking shops and bars along the way.

The Temple of 10,000 Buddhas was a unique place, though I could have done without the rivers of sweat. There are many unusual golden statues on the hike up. My favorite one had arms



coming out of its eye sockets. There is a tower you can climb up, a vegetarian cafe, and a waterfall with many turtles.

For nightlife, the area around Victoria Peak seemed to have several bars, and close to Mong Kok is Portland Avenue, which had at least one bar (with karaoke!) that we found. Just try to not get pushed out by an off-duty cop like we were.

## Last Minute Points

- >> Most dim sum restaurants will charge you for tea. This was obnoxious to me, a non-drinker of tea.
- >> You can get nearly a full refund for an Octopus card at the airport station.
- >> Alcohol consumption laws are similar to those in Japan. You are "of course" allowed to imbibe whilst walking in public, according to a local.

Hong Kong is a fascinating city. I would highly recommend a visit. Hopefully the city is able to come to a peaceful resolution with China concerning its elections and remain the vibrant tourist attraction that it is.

Brittany Teodorski



>> Background Image courtesy of Peter Theony via Flickr  
>> Group photo courtesy of Erin Diane; all others courtesy of the author



# Summit Surprises and Consistent Challenges

Last month was a busy time for many world leaders first attending the Asian-Pacific Economic Partnership (APEC) Summit in Beijing, China and then the G-20 Leaders Summit in Brisbane, Australia. These summits, often merely speeches of flattery and pats on the back or of criticism with wags of the finger sometimes surprise everyone and introduce positive policy goals for the future. China and the United States' announcement targeting carbon emissions at the APEC Summit and America, Australia, and Japan's decision to continue increased cooperation in military and maritime security in Brisbane are two such examples.

However, let's not forget that behind all the attempts in "advancing regional economic integration; promoting innovative development, economic reform, and growth; and strengthening comprehensive connectivity and infrastructure development" there are plenty of smaller, almost insignificant, moments that must be blown out of proportion and dissected for their secret meanings. This year's top moments included President Obama's chewing gum debacle, President Xi Jinping influencing all the leaders to wear the same traditional, yet Sith lord-like gowns, and Vladimir Putin's charming attempt to keep China's First Lady warm.

Alas, there is own more moment that is particularly significant for Japan; Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's painfully awkward handshake with Xi. Drastically different than the warm embrace Abe used with India's



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Abe simply extended his hand, shared some words, which were then translated by an aide and then quickly ignored by Xi, whose face embodied the

dictionary definition of unimpressed. However, later during the Summit on November 10, Abe and Xi held closed doors talks, the first for both men since coming to power. Afterward both nations made statements promising to work together to ease tensions in disputed maritime space, an area that has the potential to quickly escalate, and hopes to improve economic ties, another area that has been damaged due to the souring relationship. China had even removed their ships from **disputed waters**, but unfortunately they entered for a short period again on November 26. Yet, far from any region-altering agreements, the meeting is nonetheless important as a step to improving the tense relations. Although both countries still face major hurdles especially when it comes to appeasing their respective domestic populations and their allies, the two nations have to start somewhere.

Abe's meetings continued in Brisbane, Australia during the G20 Leaders' Summit on November 15 and 16, the most important one for Japan occurring between United States' President Barack Obama and Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott. These nations often performing a balancing act by stating they welcome a peaceful global rise by China, but implement policies or release statements that can be construed as limiting and safeguarding against such a rise. For example, these countries' leaders "expressed their commitment to deepening the trilateral partnership among Australia, Japan and the United States to ensure a peaceful, stable, and prosperous future for the Asia-Pacific region," in a **statement** released on November 16, days after Beijing's APEC Summit. Such statements are always an attempt to not-so-subtly remind China that unilateral attempts to change the regions status quo will not be tolerated. However, it should be said that Australia released another statement the following day saying it had completed negotiations on the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, which ultimately brings the two nations closer economically.

If these two summits show anything in regards to Japan and China and the hopes for a better relationship, it's that the process will be slow and arduous with both

countries inching toward positive gains and then stepping aside to reaffirm other commitments and attitudes that align with their respective supporters. Yet, any steps forward on these issues are far better than standing still, or worse sliding backward. At a time where Japan faces many uncertainties especially in its economic sector, establishing a dialogue and behavior norms between the two nations can create one less thing Abe has to worry about.

Sean Mulvihill

If you're still wondering just how awkward that handshake was you can watch it take place [here](#).



Top Image: APEC 2014 courtesy of DFATD, MAECV  
Lower Image: G20 Summit courtesy of Crown Copyright



no zen,  
no life

# Camel Clutch and the Path Not Taken: Motoko Town

*She talks to me so quickly I can't understand*

The Alpaca (*Vicugna pacos*) is a **domesticated** species of **South American camelid**, resembling small llamas, are a unique breed of livestock with many characteristics setting them apart from traditional types of animals such as dogs, lions, hamsters and bees. Alpaca owners often use words to describe these llama-like creatures, words like 'calming', 'magical' or 'truncated camelid'.

A herd animal, alpacas do not do well when they lack the company of other alpacas. They can often be found swaddled in makeshift cocoons formed from IKEA sofa throws, local pizza menus and monkey nut shells, and swiping through the Facebook photo albums of estranged school friends who have forgotten to enable their privacy settings.



*I don't even know her name*

Alpacas demonstrate a 'striding' gait unique to camelids. Rather than walking with alternating front and back legs, they will lift both legs on the same side when walking forward and will sometimes cheer, whilst other alpacas - emboldened by their unique non-alternating same side motion - bob across the landscape forwards, backwards, and tentatively sideways.

This impressive feat is undercut somewhat by poor culinary skills; cheap, locally sourced fish, low calorie meat, vegetables, sprouts and legumes are reduced to a viscous, tar like amorphous paste. The cloven hooves of the animal make it hopelessly unable to comprehend the simplest of tools: knives, forks, and wooden slotted spoons ideal for draining excess oils - spatulas.

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Herds of alpacas stay in close proximity to each other. In fact, an early sign of illness in an alpaca will often be that they have separated themselves from the rest of the herd. But unlike like African elephants who create thick matted pouches of mud, straw and crushed insect vertebrae in order to enslave their want-away siblings, the alpaca tribe share a communal understanding that it is essential to leave the herd in order to reflect on and ultimately consolidate personal desires, fears and ambitions.



*She cleaned my hanko;  
I bought a cheap holder and the ink ran out*

Opaiyama, which roughly translates to 'sweet ginger piping' in English, is next to the JR and Hanshin stations in Sannomiya and is a popular play area for aureate JETs, blundering would be rappers and nebulous street urchins, including, of course, your dear author. Local culinary hotspots such as KFC, Burger King and 7-Eleven whip up a nightly fervor amongst skittish masticators, and bars such as IZNT, Hobgoblin and The Hub provide entertainment that evokes the halcyon days of the Moulin



Rouge. However, many of these discordant excursionists fail to break free from the wattle and daub cocoons ritualistically fashioned by their proboscidean matriarchs and spend each weekend ensconced in a fug of transatlantic hubris.

Just like the man who walks down the same path every day and then one day walks down a different one, there are other paths to explore. One such place is Motoko Town, not a path per say, but rather a slew of thrift stores, second hand book shops, kinky bars and even a reptile shop flanking one huge solitary path with two other paths, smaller and thinner but just as long, on the outside. The reptile shop, whose owners - flush with the confidence that owning three types of African jungle snake brings - will drape you if you ask nicely or stare balefully until they get uncomfortable, free of charge, in one of their squamatic hostages.

*I'm glad she came*

The real fun begins however, as with most things, when the lights are off, or in this case on, as I mean at nighttime. Shops packed to bursting with identikit Ultraman figurines from, oh let's say 1986, 1992 and other dates make way for ad hoc bars populated sporadically by transients; the air bathed in Udon brine - choice language and swarthy behavior are par for the course here. Like a hot meat pie sliced open to reveal a different kind of meat than you were expecting and

possibly even vegetables, this is the real Kobe, where 500 yen beers are traded in for 380 yen ones and sometimes even for the usual 500 yen one but with different glasses so it's better.

Seasonal Highlights include Bees Knees Lowbrow Rock n' Roll Bar in Motoko Town 3; run by a Canadian expat and hand-built inside a previously dormant storage unit, it's a raucous mix of local and international rockabilly bands playing in an upstairs venue that has to be seen to be believed.

*Maybe she'll come to the enka*

There is, also, if you dare to find it, an unnamed bar run by a semiprofessional dominatrix where the walls are festooned with whips and the beer is served with snarls in long pewter cups. The only clues to its location are the golden cobra door handle outside, and the smell of unfettered sexual intrigue emanating from the inside. If this isn't your bag, or perhaps your bag is full of black inedible mush cooked by insouciant camelids, a stone's throw away is a small but perfectly malformed shop that sells vacuum packed G-strings in copious supply. I would have bought one, but, like the majority of JETs that pepper this fair isle like peppercorns on a steak, pepper in a jar or even mustard, I don't mix well with strangers.

*Scott Patterson*



>> Motoko Town starts at Motomachi JR train station and runs underneath the train line until it ends at Kobe JR station.



## Five Movies You Should Watch

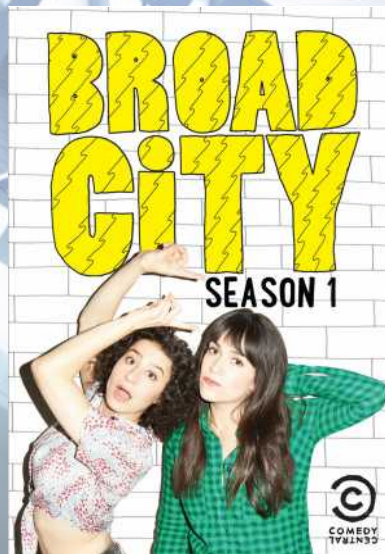
It's December and the weather has turned bitterly against us. The idea of heading outdoors is growing less and less attractive we find ourselves wanting to curl up under the kotatsu and simply relax. Luckily, this month we provide you with five things to watch as you take a break from last month's reading and some of the grading many of us are busy doing after end of term exams.

### Broad City (DVD release: Dec 2, 2014)

Created by Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson  
Comedy Central works magic in providing its audience with off-centered, yet relatable humor. Whether you're a fan of satire news programs like the Daily Show or the Colbert Report, sketch comedy with Key & Peele, sitcoms like *Workaholics* (one of my personal favorites), or any number of their animated shows, *Broad City* is another series that will not disappoint. Initially a webseries that was picked up by Comedy Central in January of this year, *Broad City* will be releasing its first season on DVD this month, making it the perfect Christmas gift for any family member or friend. The show follows two broke friends Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson, also the show's creators, who struggle to make a living in New York. Anyone who has graduated with a mountain of student debt and worked minimum wage jobs will find the unfortunate similarities hilarious and will no doubt make you feel your own situation.

### Dumb and Dumber (Dec 16, 1994)

Directed by Peter Farrelly and Bobby Farrelly  
One of my favorite comedies growing up, *Dumb and Dumber* is celebrating its 20th year anniversary this month. It's well-timed too since the sequel to the movie came out in the States last month (although the reviews have been anything but reassuring). Filmed at a time when Jim Carrey was at the



height of his acting career with productions like *Ace Ventura*, *Liar Liar*, and *The Mask*, and *Full House* was coming to an end for Jeff Daniels, the two comedians took ordinary gag jokes to another level with their characters blending good-natured fun and naivety. It's the classic tale of two best friends finding a briefcase stuffed with cash who seek to return it to its rightful owner, the girl of their dreams, and end up saving the day with their unintentional heroics. You're never too old to revisit the movie that provided you the means to replicate the most annoying sound in the world or a perfect one-liner about Big Gulps.

### Gone Girl (release date: Dec 12, 2014)

Directed by David Fincher, based on the novel by Gillian Flynn

I know this is going to seem like a bad case of déjà vu from last month's book recommendations, but there hasn't really been a movie I've been this excited for since coming to Japan. David Fincher is a heavyweight when it comes to directing with works that include *Alien3*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Fight Club*, *Seven*, *The Social Network*, *The Zodiac* and much more, and who has recently used his skills to direct two episodes in the popular Netflix series *House of Cards*. His latest film is an adaptation of Gillian Flynn's bestselling novel *Gone Girl* stars Ben Affleck as the husband and suspected murderer of his wife Amy Dunne played by Rosamund Pike. In the past I was always a little wary seeing Affleck take the



lead role (I blame it on Gigli), but his recent work in *The Town* and *Argo* stymied that worry (though his portrayal of Batman can probably go either way). It should also help that Affleck and Pike are supported by a diverse cast that includes Neil Patrick Harris and Tyler Perry. If you still haven't read the book, it's a quick read and you can easily finish it before seeing it in theaters. Many of Fincher's films have been book adaptations and been largely met with enthusiastic support from even the most loyal fans of the original works. There is no reason to believe that *Gone Girl* will be any different.

### Howl's Moving Castle (Nov 20, 2004 in Japan)

Directed by Hayao Miyazaki, based on the novel by Diana Wynne Jones

Another movie celebrating an anniversary, though it happened to be last month, comes from Studio Ghibli. This recommendation also comes after a handful of JETs made their way to the Takeda Castle Ruins, which is said to have influenced the animators in another Studio Ghibli film, *Castle in the Sky*, and unfortunately doesn't really relate to this movie (but is still a fun fact!). *Howl's Moving Castle* is a film filled with magic, war, and love, and its intriguing story is filled with a number of subplots. Sophie, the 18 year old protagonist, is turned into an elderly woman by a witch and, in an attempt to reverse the curse, she arrives at Howl's Castle, having met the powerful wizard Howl during an earlier encounter. Meeting a handful of colorful characters throughout her adventure,



she is eventually asked by Howl to go on his behalf to deny a request by a king bent on war. Finding out that Howl and a number of other characters face their own problems, Sophie is often asked to help others and demonstrates throughout the movie love's power to conquer all.

### Princess Jellyfish (Dec 27, 2014)

Directed by Taisuke Kawamura, based on the manga series by Akiko Higashimura

This month a live-action film of *Princess Jellyfish*, a manga series written and illustrated by Akiko Higashimura, will be released through Asmik Ace Entertainment. The film follows the often awkward and anti-social Tsukimi Kurashita who also happens to be a lover of Jellyfish due to a connection with her deceased mother. Tsukimi lives in an apartment with fellow otaku women – those obsessed with anime or manga, although other interests can be included – and a cross-dressing son of a politician. However, the apartment complex where these diverse residents live, known as Anamizukan, is soon threatened by development projects in their neighborhood. Together they must find a way to save their building from potential destruction. Beside this film and the manga series, an animated version of *Princess Jellyfish* from 2010 can also be found on DVD for anyone interested in expanding their anime universe.



Grab some friends, wrap up under some warm blankets and take a break from the Osaka all-nighters to enjoy a cozy evening watching some great films.

Sean Mulvihill



## The Durants

"The Durants" first appeared in the August 2014 issue. Catch up on parts I, II, III, and IV.

V. "Mom, we have to go, now!" Bionca pleaded while her father held their door open. Gaia shook together with the earth beneath her feet as she grabbed everything she thought might help. "Just grab the sword and let's go! We don't have time for this!" her daughter warned, desperation crawling into her sweet voice.

Tying the sword around her waist, Gaia followed her grown child and husband out the door. Ash and a red haze from magma finding its way to the surface blotted out the sun. A chill took a hold of the mother.

The trio ran toward the center of Hyra, hoping to catch the Sullivans and Dr. Carlton before they fled. Before they could reach Drake's store, however, they were apprehended by a growing mob.

"The Harbinger! The Harbinger did this!"

"Leave her to die with her curse!"

"Take off her head!"

The cacophony rose as froth began to line the Hyrans' lips like some sort of garish cosmetic. Hands clawed toward the woman, but she shook them off with the help of her parents. Fear coiled around the citizens of the dying oasis, the hysteria nearly palpable. After all these years the volcano was now unleashing the Hyrans' suppressed hostility toward the Durants.

"Enough!" a voice cut through the discord. Drake and Oscar appeared upon their roof. "We all needa leave now.

We don't got time for your squabblin'."

"Bee, com'ere." Oscar offered his hand. She took it and looked out over the townsfolk. Their eyes held both the typical paranoia and an animalistic horror at the situation in which they had found themselves.

"Now listen up! We need to get to safety now! We're gonna head toward the capital." Bionca saw a dark look pass between her parents. "These past few years've been hard on people. They'll be prowlin' the roads, lookin' to pick off the weak. We must stand strong. Together! Or we will die." Drake's confident voice drowned the dying murmurs of the superstitious. He turned toward his son and Bionca, and squeezed both of their shoulders. "Oscar, my man. Keep Bee here safe. Bee, you keep my man safe. Stick together, or we're all goners." The ageing man scrambled down the side of his shop and was immediately swarmed by all seeking protection under his leadership.

Bionca saw a figure in the distance struggling with a cart. She nudged Oscar before jumping down. Frantically, she took the cart stocked with medical supplies from the doctor's hands.

"Thank you Bionca," he greeted wearily. "You've always been such a big help." The doctor smiled warmly at the woman, tired wrinkles stretching out from his eyes. Oscar caught him by his upper arm as he wobbled on his rotting peg leg.

"You really oughta get that replaced, Doc," the man chastised. "Too late now, I s'pose."

Tremors began to spread under their feet, prompting the Hyrans to scurry as one frightened colony toward the

capital road. As they reached the mountain pass farthest from the spewing lava, rocks rained upon them from above and large swathes of their former home sunk into the ground, revealing biting cold seawater. Drake did his best to lead the Hyrans out of their dying land while his son tried to quell their nerves. Dr. Carlton and the Durants brought up the rear, the quartet all silently worrying about what violence the people may inflict on the Harbinger if they were not careful.

The volcano belched a cloud of ash and returned to sleep.

One night after several days of walking, Brion fell into a fitful sleep. He dreamed his face was reflected in the moon, his daughter struggling toward him through space as his wife watched helplessly from the earth. When he was awoken by a sharp crack, sweat coated his entire body. Bewildered, he searched around their small camp separated from the rest of the Hyrans. The fire was smoking, only embers remaining. Near its carcass, Oscar lay facedown, eerily still.

Farther into the distance, he could make out the form of three people, one struggling between the others. Brion grabbed the blood-stained rock beside the fire and crept toward the trio. One step. Six steps. As quickly and quietly as he could, he approached the abductors. He threw his weight into the smaller one and cleaved his weapon into the jaw of the other.

The sickening crack was soon joined by the shrieks of the Hyran man and grunts from the road-worn woman. Bionca shredded her bonds and leapt toward her father. Stumbling and screaming, the Hyran returned toward his camp, likely to rouse the others and drive out the Durants. The road-woman glared up at the pair, crouching before

bounding into the darkness.

Visibly shaken, father and daughter rushed back to their dying fire. Bionca shook the slumber out of the others while Brion cared for Oscar. Dr. Carlton joined him shortly. There was a heavily bleeding gash where he had been struck with the rock. The pair worked quickly to wash out the wound and suture it up with the supplies they had toted along.

"My boy," Drake whispered mournfully to himself. "Why did they do this to my boy?" A slow stream of tears trekked down his cheek before falling to the ground. When beckoned, he helped Brion pull Oscar onto the cart, sacrificing some of the supplies.

"We need to go." There was no room for question in Bionca's voice.

"We're weak on our own. We gotta stick with--"

"Drake, they tried to kill both of our children." A fire radiated from Brion. "We have to leave them before they come back to finish the job."

The old shopkeeper hung his head, two last tears falling directly to the earth before his eyes dried. Steeling himself, he rose to his full height, towering over the others. "Then let's get goin'. We can't waste anymore time." He grabbed Dr. Carlton under his arm. The doctor hobbled less with Drake's assistance. Brion and Bionca struggled with the cart occupied by Oscar, and Gaia grabbed what fallen supplies she could.

Wistfully she looked back at the camp, lamenting the chasm that had appeared between them and the Hyrans.

Brittany Teodorski



## Tochigi Prefecture: A Nature-lover's Paradise near Tokyo

Yo! My name is Ryan Suzuki. I was born and raised in California. I've moved around a few times, but the last city I lived in before JET was Garden Grove. I'm in my 2nd year on JET and I teach at Tochigi High School in Tochigi City. It's an all-boys super science high school. It's supposedly the 2nd best school in the prefecture, but I have yet to find any signs of intelligence... JK, these kids are alright.

*Why did you apply for the JET program?*

I will spare all of you the boredom of the generic answers people usually say. Ultimately, I wanted/needed a drastic change in my life. Since I was already studying Japanese and had friends living in Japan, JET seemed like one of the best ways for me to change environments. Also, it was a good opportunity to try out teaching as a potential career.



*How did you end up in your prefecture?  
Was it a preference of yours?*

Tochigi was not a preference of mine, but it was pretty close to the area I wanted to be in. Using just the local lines, I'm only 1.5 hours from Tokyo, so I can't really complain. As for how I ended up here...your guess is as good as mine.

*What has been your favorite memory in your prefecture so far?*

That's hard to say. I've made some great memories with all sorts of people. However, my weekend Bonenkai trip in Kinugawa Onsen was quite an experience. I might have seen more naked coworkers than I wanted to, but sitting in an outdoor onsen during a snowfall was really beautiful. Following that, it was pretty sweet watching my coworkers go crazy at the hotel dinner party.

*Is there a "best" time to visit your prefecture?*

Definitely fall. Nikko and the surrounding area have beautiful scenery during the color changing season. Also, in November there is an awesome wine festival hosted at the Coco Winery in Ashikaga city. Each attendee gets a bottle of wine after paying an entrance fee, and that is pretty much a guarantee to have a good time.



*What are your "Must Do's" for visiting JETs?*

Besides great nature, Nikko has the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Toshogu Shrine. It's the resting place of the Tokugawa shogunate founder, Tokugawa Ieyasu. For the mountain hikers, Mt. Nantai is also in Nikko and provides a great day hike. If you're an onsen-maniac, then I recommend Kinugawa Onsen. Finally, if you have time, you should stop by Dale Brown's place. He's a 2nd year JET as well, and apparently, well you'll just have to go there and see for yourself.

*What do you feel is unique to your prefecture, something JETs can't find anywhere else?*

I apologize for being repetitive, but Nikko is the selling point of my prefecture. However, if you like shoyu-style ramen, Sanno City is famous for that stuff. It's pretty damn good. Utsunomiya is the capital of Tochigi and is known for its gyoza. From what I'm told, there's a monkey bar – a drinking establishment with real monkeys inside – in Utsunomiya as well. I don't think the monkeys actually serve you drinks though...or do they?

*Anything else you want to add?*

If you have any questions, feel free to shoot me an email or find me on Facebook. [Ryanjsuzuki@gmail.com](mailto:Ryanjsuzuki@gmail.com)



Background image courtesy of moogs via Flickr.

All others courtesy of Ryan Suzuki.



photo  
spread

# Fall Leaves



Contributors: Louis Bertenshaw, Erika Horweg, Kristen Keeno, Oba Powis, Skye Shields, Claire Waretin, Thomas, Dana Warren, Brandon Yanari

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calendar

december

- Outside Hyogo

Awaji

Hanshin

Kobe
- AJET Events

Tajima

Tamba

Harima

monday	tuesday	wednesday	thursday	friday	saturday	sunday
1 Osaka Great Santa Run (Osaka)	2	3	4	5	6 Tsurumi Laser Beam Show (Osaka)	7
Kobe Luminarie						
Art Collection: II Visual Deception II Into the Future						
8	9	10	11 HAJET @ Kobe Luminarie Himeji Castle Anniversary Kobe Luminarie	12	13	14 Ako Gishi Sai - 47 Loyal Samurai
Art Collection: II Visual Deception II Into the Future						
15 Ako Antique Market Kobe Luminarie	16 Hanukkah begins	17	18	19	20 Ramen Expo: Round Two (Osaka)	21
Art Collection: II Visual Deception II Into the Future						
22	23 天皇誕生日 : The Emperor's Birthday	24 Christmas Eve Hanukkah ends Shrine Laughter Ritual (Osaka)	25 Christmas	26 Kwanzaa begins	27 Minatogawa Craft Market	28
Art Collection: II Visual Deception II Into the Future						
29	30	31 New Year's Eve	all month Ancient Egyptian Queens & Goddesses NHK Taiga Drama Exhibition: Kanbei Kuroda Suma Aqua Illuminage Kobe Illuminage			





*sit back and relax*